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JAMES'S IDEA OF STRUCTURE

By J. A. WARD

JAMES'S youthful ideas about the form of fiction are the germs of the principles expressed in the late prefaces. But his earliest dicta, in comparison to the late, are arid and formalist—dogmatically proclaimed, not experimentally discovered. They hint of an American Gallophile, infatuated with the rigid lines and harsh economy of the well-made play and the well-made novel. In 1874 James announced: "We confess to a conservative taste in literary matters—to a relish for brevity, for conciseness, for elegance, for perfection of form" (*LRE*, p. 139).¹ He never renounced such a taste; "brevity" and "perfection of form"—more frequently "economy" and "composition"—are as prominent, indeed as hieratic, in the prefaces as in the earliest reviews. But if James seems to have acquired his literary standards artificially and to have begun his career with a set of *a priori* principles to guide him, it was not long before he was to make these ideas his own by fully understanding their relevance to the craft of fiction. The early assumptions are not repudiated, but tested, clarified, and deepened. There is a remarkable balance in James's mature criticism between the general principle and the pragmatically discovered insight. Though the insistence on economy and order is never relaxed, the concepts become increasingly more flexible; with ease they accommodate notions of fiction that seem contradictory. James repeatedly exults in the freedom of the novelist: "the Novel remains still, under the right persuasion, the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms" (*AN*, p. 326). Indeed to James it is plastic enough and prodigious enough to allow for the reconciliation of the art of Scribe with that of Balzac, and of the principles of Coleridge with those of Flaubert.

It follows that the critic who searches James's writings to discover his conception of the structure of fiction encounters a unique set of difficulties. There is ample evidence of a Neo-Classical James, whose critical lexicon is headed by terms like "logic," "law," "symmetry," "geometry," and "science," in addition to the ever prominent "economy" and "composition." But there is the equally formidable Romanticist James, for whom the indispensable terms are "germ," "organic form," "growth," "freedom," and "imagination." Clearly James had little of the academician's concern for the consistent and

crystalline system. His criticism became increasingly pragmatic and *ex post facto*. He employed whatever terms and ideas were available to suit his needs and match his performance. Nevertheless the problem remains: what in James's idea of the structure of fiction is Neo-Classical and formalist? what is Romantic and organicist? what is uniquely his own?

Much of James's early criticism shows that he regarded form as the most important element in literature; and in most of these early reviews and essays such characteristic expressions as "admirably-balanced and polished composition," "delicate art," and "studied compactness" (*LRE*, p. 215) are employed without reference to subject matter. Still it is exceedingly rare to find James issuing such a pronouncement as that which he delivers in his review of *Far from the Madding Crowd*: "we really imagine that a few arbitrary rules—a kind of depleting process—might have a wholesome effect. It might be enjoined, for instance, that no 'tale' should exceed fifty pages and no novel two hundred; that a plot should have but such and such a number of ramifications" (*LRE*, p. 295). "Form" is not an independent concept to James. It is the ultimate criterion—"what makes a good book a classic" (*FPN*, p. 180)—but it is not a mold to be superimposed upon substance or a linguistic embodiment of aesthetic precept. "Form" is the shape of a literary work in which there is "an unfailing cohesion of all ingredients" (*LRE*, p. 208). Form is thus inseparable from substance, and, insofar as it is dependent upon substance, it is also subordinate to it. These principles are seldom expressed by the youthful James, but they are his standards of composition at least as early as *The Portrait of a Lady*—as the notebooks unmistakably show.

However one should not be tempted to discard the Neo-Classical impression given by James's

¹ For brevity the following initials are used to cite volumes of James's criticism: *AN*: *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, introduction by Richard P. Blackmur (New York, 1934); *SL*: *Selected Letters of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel (London, 1956); *LRE*: *Literary Reviews and Essays*, ed. Albert Mordell (New York, 1957); *SA*: *The Scenic Art*, ed. Allan Wade (New York, 1957); *FPN*: *French Poets and Novelists* (London, 1919); *FN*: *The Future of the Novel*, ed. Leon Edel (New York, 1956); *N*: *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdoch (New York, 1955); *NN*: *Notes on Novelists* (London, 1914); *VR*: *Views and Reviews*, ed. LeRoy Phillips (Boston, 1908).

early essays and reviews—and indeed by his late notebooks and prefaces. Rather the problem should be more precisely phrased. In what way are "symmetry" and "harmony" inevitable effects of a unified representation? James delights "in a deep-breathing economy and an organic form" (*AN*, p. 84); implicit in this and numerous similar remarks is the belief that such a form is geometrical. In other words, it is James's conviction that the form which best expresses an "idea" is necessarily of "the highest perfection and the rarest finish" (*FN*, p. 36). The "organic" and the "scientific" are somehow one.

To James a novel or tale succeeds when it possesses intensity, coherence, and completeness. Intensity is the fullness and richness of texture that James found pre-eminently in Balzac. Coherence is the demonstration of the relevance of every part of the work to every other part. Completeness is the representation of the maximum of relationships logically involved in a subject. The standards are mutually dependent, so that a work deficient in one area is also deficient in the others. Implicit in James's three-fold standard of excellence is the assumption that experience is most fully revealed when it is made lucid—that is, coherent. James's idea of coherence is more severe than that of most novelists; it is a concept repeatedly defined through the analogies of architecture, carpentry, and geometry. Though inseparable from substance, the form of a work can be discussed as an abstract entity, as when James speaks of the design of a work as a tapestry, a mosaic, or a geometrical figure, or when he refers to *The Portrait of a Lady* as "a structure reared with an 'architectural' competence" (*AN*, p. 52). James's embarrassment over his "misplaced middles," failures in proportion caused by excessive preparation, follows from his conviction that coherence is necessarily symmetrical.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of proportion to James. The term is close in meaning to "composition," "rhythm," and "harmony." James puts such stress on the idea of proportion that one critic equates James's entire concept of form with "the right distribution" of parts.² Virtually every one of James's novels and tales is marked by proportionate arrangement: of dialogue in relation to narration, of the internal and the external lives of the characters, of characters, locations, and "blocks" of material of all kinds.

One observes James adjusting his character arrangements and episodes so as to achieve a predetermined neatness and balance. The notes

on *The Spoils of Poynton* show his effort to duplicate the precise structure of a play, wherein each act reaches its own climax. The outward shape also controls the action of *What Maisie Knew*; initially James planned for only one of Maisie's parents to remarry, but then he decided that "for a proper symmetry" (*AN*, p. 140) both should do so. On the other hand, James rebukes Robert Louis Stevenson for caring less for his subject than for the form it shall assume: "I remember no instance of his expressing a subject, as one may say, *as a subject*—hinting at what novelists mainly know, one would imagine, as the determinant thing in it, the idea out of which it springs. The form, the envelope, is there with him, headforemost, *as the idea*" (*NN*, p. 12). Unlike Stevenson, James does not devise his novels exclusively from the outside in. Rather he does so from both the outside in *and* from the inside out, guarding against excesses in both the natural development of the idea and the artificial arrangement of the form. The assumption is always that an idea is most fully developed when it assumes an orderly form. It is this assumption, more than any other, that is responsible for James's unpopularity with orthodox organicist critics. Edwin Muir, for example, deprecates James on the grounds that "If the situation is worked out logically without any allowance for the free invention of life, the result will be mechanical, even if the characters are true."³

"Logic" is one of James's essential terms. There is a logic to every given situation, which the novelist must discover and represent. It is not an imposed but an inherent logic. Mr. Muir presumably would object that a human situation contains no logic, that accident rather than necessity is the law of human conduct. But to James, for whom art "makes" rather than imitates life, "felicity of form and composition . . . mercilessly rests" on the exhibition of those "related" "figures and things" which are "*indispensable*" (*AN*, p. 5) to the treatment of an idea. The form of the achieved novel is felicitous, not because the various relations fall naturally into a form, but because the novelist contrives to make them seem to do so. "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so" (*AN*, p. 5). The geometry—or the logic—is the author's own, and yet it is ideally inherent in the root

² René Wellek, "Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," *AL*, xxx (November 1958), 316.

³ *The Structure of the Novel* (New York, 1929), p. 48.

idea. Without the geometry or the logic, the novel would fall short not only in "lucidity" and "roundness," but also in "completeness." Conversely, if the idea is logically developed—and thus its truth most completely expressed—the story will possess "a certain assured appearance of roundness and felicity" (*AN*, p. 129). This aesthetic principle is the basis of James's idea of structure.

In many respects James's organicism seems identical with that of Emerson and Whitman. This is especially true of the belief that the form and the substance of a work are inseparable, that the shape follows directly and inevitably from the germinating idea. Also James regularly refers to the creative process in organicist terms. It could easily have been Whitman who compared a "genuine poem" to "a tree that breaks into blossom and shakes in the wind" (*VR*, p. 135). Yet James was not such an extreme organicist that he would appear to abolish measurable form altogether. Nor did he assume that a geometrical or even a coherent form would magically emanate from free development. The novelist must constantly hold the finished shape of his work in mind even as he allows the germ of his fictional situation to develop freely: "I have ever failed to see how a coherent picture of anything is producible save by a complex of fine measurements" (*AN*, p. 30).

It is not for nothing that James habitually uses the language of architecture in his considerations of fictional form. To James architecture, with its emphasis on proportion and symmetry, is virtually analogous to composition.⁴ Architecture is both science and art; the architectural structure can simultaneously conform to the most exact geometric measurements and demonstrate the organic principle of free expansion. Certainly the theories of organic architecture of such contemporaries and near-contemporaries of James as Horatio Greenough, John Wellborn Root, Henry Hobson Richardson, and Louis Henri Sullivan comprise the best available parallel to James's theories of structure.⁵ James's metaphorical account of the writing of *The Portrait of a Lady* perfectly illustrates the organic theory of architecture: "this single small corner-stone, the conception of a certain young woman affronting her destiny, had begun with being all my outfit for the large building of 'The Portrait of a Lady.' It came to be a square and spacious house" (*AN*, p. 48). The organic theory of architecture stresses what is often absent or subordinate in organic theories of literature: that proportion, regularity, and geometry—in short,

composition—are necessary attributes of the form that follows function. An organic pattern, unlike a mechanical pattern, develops logically from the controlling idea, but is no less considerate of outward appearance (thus the "building" of *The Portrait* is "square"). Organicism in architecture is opposed not only to order for its own sake, which is necessarily lifeless, but also to orderlessness.⁶ Correspondingly, James has little tolerance for the bloodless symmetry of the well-made play, for example those of such a "supremely skillful contriver and arranger" (*SA*, p. 40) as Sardou. But he is no less disdainful of inartistic novels, the "loose baggy monsters" (*AN*, p. 84) of Thackeray, Tolstoy, Hugh Walpole, Arnold Bennett, and numerous others. Thus to James a synthesis of the natural and the artificial is not merely possible, it is of first importance—as he suggests in "The Future of the Novel": "[Many] see the whole business [of the novel] too divorced on the one side from observation and perception, and on the other from the art and taste. They get too little of the first-hand impression, the effort to penetrate . . . and still less, if possible, of any science of composition, any architecture, distribution, proportion" (*FN*, p. 41).

James's creative energy thrived on the reconciliation of opposites. It is the unrelenting conflict of opposed intentions that gives James's prefaces and notebooks their dramatic interest. (Thus it is quite fitting that in both the prefaces and notebooks James should carry on dialogues with himself.) The central tension, that which includes nearly all the others, is the resolve to be

⁴ At times James means other things by the term "architecture," such as an involved plot, an accumulation of detail, and a novel of extreme magnitude and variety.

⁵ See Richard P. Adams, "Architecture and the Romantic Tradition: Coleridge to Wright," *AQ*, ix (Spring 1957), 46–62. The relation of the organic theory of architecture to literary practice is implied in the following essays in Lewis Mumford's anthology, *Roots of Contemporary American Architecture* (New York, 1959): Horatio Greenough, "Form and Function," pp. 32–56; Louis Henri Sullivan, "Towards the Organic," pp. 74–82; Lewis Mumford, "The Regionalism of Richardson," pp. 117–131. James's own endorsement of organic architecture is suggested in his letter to the sculptor Hendrik Andersen: "Cities are living organisms that grow from within" (*SL*, p. 230).

⁶ See, for example, John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Everyman's Library (London, n.d.), II, 163: "it is one of the chief virtues of the Gothic builders, that they never suffered ideas of outside symmetries and consistencies to interfere with the real use and value of what they did. [They were] utterly regardless of any established conventionalities of external appearance, knowing (as indeed it always happened) that such daring interruptions of the formal plan would rather give additional interest to its symmetry than injure it."

at the same time natural and artificial, or organic and mechanical. The following list, in which James's own terms are as much as possible used, catalogues and categorizes the subordinate antitheses:

The Organic Principle	The Mechanical Principle
Incongruities	Congruities
Multiplicity	Unity
The novel	The drama
The explosive	The economical
The developmental	The anecdotal
The novel as independent form	The novel as genre
Imagination	Logic
Incompleteness	Roundness
Muddlement	Comprehension

James, in spite of his fondness for principles, disdained schematic formulae; thus the headings of the above lists are not to be rigidly interpreted. The terms illustrating "the organic principle" reveal the novelist's impulse toward free expression and expansiveness, while those illustrating "the mechanical principle" reveal the contrary inclination toward restraint and a predetermined order.

Nearly all James's novels and tales may be read as a blending of the congruous and the incongruous, rather a fusion of incongruous parts into a unified whole. Actually most of the starting ideas for James's creations express some fundamental contrast or incongruity. In *The Princess Casamassima*, for example, James's "scheme called for the suggested nearness (to all our apparently ordered life) of some sinister anarchic underworld" (*AN*, p. 76). The pervasive incongruity of *The Wings of the Dove* is that of "a young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early stricken and doomed" (*AN*, p. 288). The "charm" of Daisy Miller is "incongruous" (*AN*, p. 269); that is, incongruous with her vulgarity. Among other things, James's fictions combine Europe and America, the past and the present, the proximate house and the other house, the intelligent and the foolish, the artist and the philistine, the sinister and the normal, and the good heroine and the bad heroine.

But "the precious element of contrast and antithesis" (*AN*, p. 251) alone is valueless to James. Some fundamental "consistency" must be effected so that the divergent elements may "somehow hang together" (*AN*, p. 75); they must be absorbed and unified by the whole. Such harmonizing techniques as consistency of point

of view and singleness of tone are contributive but not essential to unity. For the novelist's overriding duty is to synthesize: "the novel . . . reports of an infinite diversity of matters, gathers together and gives out again a hundred sorts, and finds its order and its structure, its unity and its beauty, in the alternation of parts and the adjustment of differences" (*NN*, p. 280).

Now it is obvious that all novels to some extent are blendings of incongruities; some conflict must be resolved. James's divergence from the common habit is in degree rather than in fundamental approach. For one thing, his antitheses are more extreme and more pronounced. Indeed James's principle of antithesis and contrast is responsible for much of the annoyance felt by Maxwell Geismar, who maintains that absolute contrasts in fiction violate the character of human life.⁷ The completeness of James's contrasts has also led critics to suggest the melodrama and the well-made play—both literary forms in which stark and simple contrast is the prime structural principle—as sources and analogies of many of James's works.

It may be more profitable, however, to relate James's idea of contrast to architecture rather than to other literary forms. The architectural analogy is not only favored by James and indicative of his larger conceptions of structure, but it is especially useful in considering the matter of contrast. Architecture, by definition, resolves contrary stresses and includes irregularities in a large harmony. James preferred a revealed to a disguised structure in architecture—in which respect he forecast twentieth-century functionalism. Likewise in his judgment of the novel he sought "traceable lines, divinable direction" (*NN*, p. 262). No structural lines in his works are more traceable than those formed by contrasts.

James was well aware of the dangers implicit in the architectural approach to fiction. The unrelaxed symmetry of character opposition, like the application of the principles of proportion and alternation of parts, can easily lead to an excessive and mechanical regularity. He speaks of the lifeless perfection of a poem by George Eliot: "George Eliot's elaborate composition is like a vast mural design in mosaic-work, where great slabs and delicate morsels of stone are laid together with wonderful art, where there are plenty of noble lines and generous hues, but where everything is rigid, measured, and cold—nothing dazzling, magical, and

⁷ *Henry James and the Jacobites* (Boston, 1963), p. 243.

vocal" (*VR*, pp. 135-136). In architecture as in fiction, James sought the sense of motion rather than static arrangement. He delighted in classical and Renaissance architecture, in which he found not only a finished form, but also an organic effect. In St. Clement Danes church in London, for example, James noted the "very long high deep set windows *springing* continuously from just above pavement to roof and *passing* behind gallery" (*N*, p. 328; italics mine). Though exceedingly regular, the structure gives the illusion of life and movement. It is not merely verbal extravagance that leads James in his travel accounts to animate so many of the buildings he describes.

To James a building possesses life when its various parts fuse so as to express a single idea. But the organic effect also requires the "tone of time" to complete the blending, to suggest that the relation of part to part and of part to whole is a process, dynamic and temporal, rather than an achieved fact. One way in which James achieves tone in fiction is through prose style. An effective style has a diffusive, blurring effect that, on the one hand, conceals the exact dimensions of a carefully constructed work and, on the other, gives a superficial unity to an ill-constructed one. Thus a distinct and charming style prevents a novel from *seeming* to be an ill-arranged assortment of parts, even though it may well be. At least the illusion of organic unity results from a "suffusion of the whole thing by the voice and speech of the author" (*NV*, p. 146).

But a true organic unity can be achieved only by an application of the principle of the inseparability of parts. One part of a work—be it character, chapter, incident, scene, picture, or whatever—possesses tone insofar as other parts inhere in it. The principal effect of tone is the obscuring of separations, a benefit which only time performs in the work of architecture. In literature tone is most surely gained when parts are not merely fused from the outside—by style—but from the inside—by structure. This inward coherence can be gained only when the unity is dynamic rather than static.

The distinction between a static and a dynamic unity (and incidentally the difference between the potentiality of the drama and that of the novel) may be illustrated by the following quotations:

The fine thing in a real drama, generally speaking, is that, more than any other work of literary art, it needs a masterly structure. It needs to be shaped and fashioned and laid together, and this process makes a demand upon an artist's rarest gifts. He must combine

and arrange, interpolate and eliminate, play the joiner with the most attentive skill; and yet at the end effectually bury his tools and his sawdust, and invest his elaborate skeleton with the smoothest and most polished integument. (*VR*, p. 181)

the parts are not pieced together, they conspire and interdepend . . . (*AN*, p. 151)

Parts which are not pieced together yet conspire and interdepend cease being independent parts; nor is their subordination to the whole merely the effect of a smooth and polished integument. It is a difference between the seams being concealed and there being no seams at all. The principle of dynamic unity explains the structure of many of James's works and accounts for many of the techniques he developed. Obviously the use of a single character's point of view as a compositional center is a way of insuring that the part be indistinct from the whole. More important, James constructs his novels not to represent characters, but the relationship of characters; thus details exist not independently, but in relation to other details. The technique of "multiplication of *aspects*" (*AN*, p. 90), employed with especial rigidity in *The Awkward Age* and less insistently in many other novels, assures the interdependence of parts. Also there must be a mutual dependence of "picture"—narrative passages carefully "foreshortened"—and "scene"—distinct episodes dominated by dialogue.

As was suggested earlier, James's conception of structure reflects the Coleridgean principle of the reconciliation of opposites. Not only does James seek repeatedly to synthesize divergent, or at least contrasting, parts into a dynamic unity, but he habitually describes the act of composition as a process in which tensions are resolved. The most comprehensive of these tensions has been discussed—that between free imaginative expansion and lucidity of design.

In this context it is helpful to consider James's curious attitude toward the drama. It has been insufficiently noted that, in spite of his considerable effort to succeed as a playwright and in spite of the obvious influences of dramatic forms and techniques on his novels, James finally judged the drama an inferior form—inferior precisely because of its virtues. One may easily be misled by James's numerous tributes to the Comédie Française and by such remarks as the following: "the drama is the ripest of all the arts, the one to which one must bring most of the acquired as well as most of the natural" (*N*, p. 37). Yet this very 'ripeness' proved inhibiting

to James. Economy and precision are compelled by the restrictions inherent in the form, yet the rules for achieving these admirable ends are externally imposed. In addition, the drama proved too confining—as is made clear by James's impatience with novels employing excessive dialogue, by his preference for states of consciousness to exhibited action, and especially by his conviction that every literary idea seeks its own mode of expression which should be independent of *a priori* restrictions in technique and length. Though its freedom from time-worn conventions leads to carelessness and looseness in the work of such writers as Wells and Bennett, ideally the novel "has the extraordinary advantage . . . that, while capable of giving an impression of the highest perfection and the rarest finish, it moves in a luxurious independence of rules and restrictions" (*FN*, p. 36). The dramatist, of course, lacks such an independence. Nevertheless, the drama remains James's model of formal excellence. The drama indicates the aesthetic effect to be aimed at, but the novel allows the artist many more ways of achieving the end. Thus the terminology of drama is as useful to James the critic as the "scenic method" and the "scenario" are to James the novelist. But "the dramatic analogy"⁸ is imperfect. The drama supplies James with some of his methods and principles, but essentially the dramatic motive is at odds with the novelistic motive.

The same tension is evident in James's efforts to resolve the needs to be both expansive and economical. He writes that "Any real art of representation is . . . a controlled and guarded acceptance, in fact a perfect economic mastery, of that conflict: the general sense of the expansive, the explosive principle in one's material thoroughly noted, adroitly allowed to flush and colour and animate the disputed value, but with its other appetites and treacheries, its characteristic space-hunger and space-cunning kept down" (*AN*, p. 278). As in this instance "the explosive principle" must be adjusted to the demands of the economical principle, so elsewhere the developmental pressure must be reconciled with the inherent restrictions of the anecdote. The anecdote, according to James, is a single, completed action, "something that has oddly happened to some one" (*AN*, p. 181). Since for its effect "the person whom [the anecdote] so distinguishes" must be represented in his relations with others, "the associational margin and connexion . . . may spread," even at a risk of the "anecdotic grace break[ing]

down" (*AN*, pp. 181–182). In another preface James observes that for proper conciseness the anecdote should be extended "as much as possible from its outer edge in, rather than from its centre outward" (*AN*, p. 233). The key phrase is "as much as possible"; it reveals the difficulties, indeed the merit, of the form. Development cannot be altogether prevented. Through foreshortening the temptation to allow the "associational margin" to "spread" may appear to be resisted, but it is merely concealed; thus the form of the anecdote—the external mold—is unviolated, while the maximum of expansion has been permitted. Of "Greville Fane" James remarks, "the subject, in this little composition, is 'developmental' enough, while the form has to make the anecdotic concession; and yet who shall say that for the right effect of a small harmony the fusion has failed" (*AN*, p. 234). The fusion is that of the organic and the mechanical processes.

Another expression of these opposing tendencies is James's curious practice of categorizing his works. On the one hand, there is his insistence that the novel is free: "A healthy, living and growing art, full of curiosity and fond of exercise, has an indefeasible mistrust of rigid prohibitions" (*FN*, pp. 224–225). It is difficult to reconcile this position with James's fondness for labelling his works. "'Kinds' are the very life of literature," he writes; "and truth and strength come from the complete recognition of them" (*AN*, p. 111). He recognizes a number of "kinds," or genres, of fiction. Though most of these are of his own invention—like the anecdote, the picture, and the *nouvelle*—each has its own structural laws, its required method, its special advantages and special disadvantages. James habitually conventionalizes his unique structural and technical methods.

The word "law" gives evidence of the same ambiguity. A Jamesian "law" (for example, "the law of entire expression" [*AN*, p. 144] and "the law of successive aspects")⁹ has the rigidity of a law of biology. Yet only the imagination of the artist can detect it and know when and where it should be applied. "Imagination," a mysterious re-shaping power, is the contrary of "logic." Fictional creation is "an act essentially not mechanical, but thinkable rather—so far as thinkable at all—in chemical, almost in mystical

⁸ Joseph Wiesenfarth, F.S.C., *Henry James and the Dramatic Analogy* (New York, 1963).

⁹ Notes to *The Ivory Tower*, ed. Percy Lubbock (London, 1917), p. 268.

terms. We can surely account for nothing in the novelist's work that hasn't passed through the crucible of his imagination. . . . It has entered, in fine, into new relations, it emerges for new ones. . . . Thus it has become a different and, thanks to a rare alchemy, a better thing" (*AN*, p. 230). The echoes of Coleridge's secondary imagination are unmistakable. Likewise the Coleridgean "fancy" means much the same as the Jamesian "logic." There is no mysticism or "rare alchemy" in the contriving of *ficelles* to assist in the representation of a *disponible*, in the proper placing of "middles," in the invention of contrasting characters to "thicken" relations, or in the elimination of all that does not contribute to the "close little march of cause and effect" (*N*, p. 251). In the main James understands imagination to be the "ciphering out" or seeing of a subject, and logic to be the coherent expression of it.¹⁰

There remains a further instance of the clash between the open principle and the closed principle: James's remarks on the question of completeness in fiction. James strives for "roundness" in his works, for the effect of a total finish. The favored term "perfect" may be hyperbolic, but there is much to suggest that James regarded the novel to be capable of attaining the "highest perfection and the rarest finish" (*FN*, p. 36) of a vase or a piece of furniture. Yet at times James holds to the organicist position that the work of art can never be judged finished, perfect, or complete. His revisionist habits surely demonstrate this. The novelist is never "disconnected" from his work: "if he is always doing he can scarce, by his own measure, ever have done" (*AN*, p. 348). And though the artist's problem is to make relations appear to end, it is a characteristic of James's novels, especially the later ones, to be incompletely resolved. From Isabel Archer to Merton Densher, a large share of James's protagonists are left at the end in partially undetermined states, so that the reader's attention turns not only to the completed action, but also to the unrecorded and uncertain future.¹¹

James's remarks on "The Turn of the Screw" are typically paradoxical. "The thing was to aim at absolute singleness, clearness and roundness, and yet to depend on an imagination working freely, working (call it) with extravagance" (*AN*, p. 172). Surely it is the imaginative "extravagance" of "The Turn of the Screw" that makes it such a provocative and ambiguous story; its verbal suggestiveness, its calculated

"mystification" (*AN*, p. 173), and its hint of unspoken, if not unspeakable, meanings—all resist the logical definition which a clear and round structure would seem to insist upon. Critics have frequently remarked that in James's late novels the area of the unmentioned seems to increase in magnitude as the network of relationships surrounding it increases in complexity. In part James is in reaction against the Victorian novelist's habit of gathering all the loose ends of a novel into a fully obvious, if untidy, knot, giving the effect that everything worth knowing about the situation has been spelled out. Paradoxically, James, who sought the logic of every case, had an uncommon respect for the resistance of life to final arrangement. Thus Christina Light remains a "disponible figure" (*AN*, p. 73) at the conclusion of *Roderick Hudson*, and so indeed do most of James's major characters. It would be impossible to say the same of the characters of Dickens.

At the conclusion of a successful James novel, the reader senses that he has been shown as much as he could possibly be made to see of the essential moral and psychological situation (not, of course, of the superficial data), but that there remains an element which is not merely unknown but unknowable.¹² In part the effect is gained by James's preference for "the muddled state" (*AN*, p. 149). The fact that even the most perceptive of his protagonists struggle with ignorance is evidence enough of James's conviction that the full truth of everything can never be known. Dorothea Krook has emphasized the relativism implicit in James's key technical terms, particularly "aspects," "conditions," and "internal relations": "the world of art . . . is a beautiful representation of the appearances present to a particular consciousness under particular conditions."¹³ Thus ambiguity

¹⁰ Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge, Eng., 1962), writes that "in James the philosophic, analytic passion is all of a piece with the poetic and the intuitive: they can be distinguished but never divided" (p. 413). To Professor Krook this quality accounts for the peculiarities of James's late style (pp. 390-413).

¹¹ Viola Hopkins, "Visual Art Devices in Henry James," *PMLA*, LXXVI (December 1961), 561-574, shows that "The irresoluteness of James's endings is suggestive of the Mannerist style—the struggle to repose which lacks a final triumph" (p. 573).

¹² What Mark Schorer says of *The Good Soldier* applies as well to James's late novels: "the mechanical structure . . . is controlled to a degree nothing less than taut, while the structure of meaning is almost blandly open, capable of limitless refraction"—"An Interpretation," *The Good Soldier* by Ford Madox Ford (New York, 1957), p. vi.

¹³ *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, p. 399.

is central to each situation, and the novelist's task is not to resolve the ambiguity but to dramatize it. A work of fiction possessing clarity and roundness, even perfection, renders life not by solving all the problems and answering all the questions inherent in the fictional situation, but by exhibiting the problems and the questions.

Coherence is not a cancellation of one or more of the heterogeneous elements or a last page revelation that the opposition has been illusory. Form exists to reveal and to suggest a tissue of implications, extensions, and connections in the central set of relationships which comprises the subject; insofar as this form is ordered and restricted will these meanings and suggestions be

manifest.¹⁴

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¹⁴ Many of James's literary principles can be traced to the matters that he valued in living. The ideal of "intensity" is a reformulation of the belief in the importance of "felt life," of being one on whom nothing is lost. Similarly the tension between fullness and economy is a recasting of the moral problem faced by many of James's protagonists. Like the artist, the James hero or heroine seeks a synthesis between freedom of mind and spirit and the restraining order of civilization. Also there exists a tension between the desire to impose rigid symmetrical patterns on life and the acceptance of the disorder of experience. This conflict underlies *The Sacred Fount*, "The Altar of the Dead," *The Golden Bowl*, and other works.